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# Research Study

## *Politicization of International Technical Organizations*

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OPR 405  
August 1975

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E.O. 12958, as amended  
December 18, 2008

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## INTRODUCTION AND KEY JUDGMENTS

The United States has experienced varying degrees of success and difficulty in achieving its goals within the United Nations system over the years. There is a growing perception, however, that during the past two years the actions of a coalition of the world's small states has made the maintenance of US interests in that body more difficult than ever. *Politicization* has become the standard term used by bureaucrats, journalists, congressmen, and academics to describe the wide spectrum of difficulties which the US now faces in international institutions. There has been particular concern that politicization has now spread from the General Assembly to the international technical and specialized organizations which the US has long valued as assemblies where the technical bases for broader international cooperation could be somewhat dispassionately established.

This study attempts to measure whether, and in what forms, politicization is increasing in these technical organizations, and what the consequences could be for US

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interests. Particular attention is given to establishing whether political issues have altered or interfered with the chartered mission and work of these agencies, and to sorting out any rising trends of political debate from the standard "noise level" of politics which is found in all international gatherings. This study also examines the meaning of politicization as seen by many of the US officials who must deal most directly with its manifestations and consequences.

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This study finds that despite a high level of political rhetoric, external political issues appear to have caused only minor damage to the substantive effectiveness of these organizations. The dichotomy between *rhetorical* and *substantive* politicization is rooted in the character and operating environment of the technical organizations as well as in the contradictory interests of the member-states. Thus, while the LDCs may find political speeches essential to a particular occasion, they are often either unwilling or unable to disrupt the functioning of these groups. This reflects in some cases their anticipation of benefits from the organizations, and in other cases their

lack of specific interest or technical competence in the matters at hand.

The low level of actual damage from politicization thus far also reflects the strong US position in these organizations -- especially the high caliber of its expertise and its good standing with the professional secretariats. Prospects are good that, by pursuing these advantages, the US can act to maintain the dichotomy and prevent any progression beyond rhetorical political activity in the technical organizations.

**PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICIZATION  
IN TECHNICAL ORGANIZATIONS  
DERIVED FROM INTERVIEWS**

	TYPE OF POLITICIZATION	
	Rhetorical	Substantive
DEGREE OF POLITICIZATION	Low or None	WHO WMO IAEA ITU IMCO ICAO UNDP UNIDO FAO
	Moderate	ITU IMCO ICAO UNDP ILO
	High	ILO UNIDO FAO

UNESCO

UNREP 28/B

[Omitted here is the body of the Study.]